

FEMINISM: A certain linguistic process of deconstruction and reconstruction

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ABSTRACT

There is a raised feminist consciousness which causes it to see how its linguistic medium is marginalised to the advantage of male usage. Feminism discovers to its chagrin that the English which men and women use in common to express their experiences is completely man-made. Such masculinisation of English needs to be deconstructed so that *usage* can be more transparent and inclusive. Feminism therefore faces many *challenges* as it seeks to reform English *usage* by making it sound more neutral, feminise it and reclaim it for more precision and more representativeness in expressing human events and experiences.

Key words: feminist awareness, androcentric patterns, female semantic denigration, generic usage

RESUME

Il existe une prise de conscience féministe qui lui permet de voir comment son support linguistique est marginalisé au profit de l'usage masculin. Le féminisme découvre avec chagrin que l'Anglais utilisé par les hommes et les femmes en commun pour exprimer leurs expériences est entièrement créé par l'homme. Une telle masculinisation de l'Anglais doit être construite de sorte que l'usage de la langue peut être plus transparent et inclusif. Le féminisme fait face à de nombreux défis car il souhaite modifier l'usage de l'Anglais en le rendant plus neutre, plus féministe et plus transparent pour plus de précision et plus de représentativité dans l'expression des événements des expériences humains.

Mots clés: conscientisation féministe, usage androcentrique, dénigrement sémantique féminine, emploi générique

Introduction

The past two decades or so have irreversibly witnessed a burst of creative energy among women with growing interest in their contribution to professional and cultural life. Women are determined and seem vigorously challenging traditional roles and representations both past and present in academic and vocational professions, in arts, in culture, and more importantly in language use and usage. It is not surprising that female roles are revisited in science and technology, in religion, in parliament and government, in education and various trades.

The whole spectrum of English language is under assault as it is inadmissibly too phallogocentric and patriarchal in conception and structure. This is because one observes that language use and usage tends to be rather too pro-male biased as a woman is consistently defined in relation to a man. Man and its related forms is used as the common or natural gender. In other words in all its manifestations man and its related forms appear as the generic, the norm, in fact as the human race per se.

Black and Coward in Cameron (1990: 112) reviewing Spender's *Man-Made Language* emphasise that

Intentionally or otherwise, men have formulated a semantic rule which posits them as central and positive as the norm, and they have classified the world from that standpoint, constructing a symbolic system which represents patriarchal order.

Such an unfair and unfavourable situation for women has brought about a certain uneasy feminist hurly-burly. Looking at such an unacceptable usage Christian (1985: 72) asserts that

Just like the Black as a group were relegated to an underclass in America by virtue of their race, so women were relegated to a separate caste by virtue of their sex.

Feminists feel that the man-made language which has constructed a sexist universe is in dire need of deconstruction in order to reconstruct it appropriately so that both sexes should be able to be reflected visibly and equitably in it as man-made language has made it a man-made world, a universe for men and only subsumed for women.

This investigation seeks to illuminate forms of expression through which women have attempted to describe, to reflect upon, to identify issues of institutionalised practice that bear on the relationship between women and language, to demonstrate ways in which women are seizing the language to broaden knowledge of the feminist lexicon which is capable of making them become free and complete human beings like men are and have been since the dawn of history.

The data was collected from various documents used in Cameroon and from the news media of Cameroon Radio and Television. A good component of the information was gleaned from authoritative sources of international origin of information storage and from the author's random jottings which he has kept over years..

Why much ado about feminism and its strategies

Women finding themselves in some sort of crossroads have come to recognise their oppressed condition and are leaving no stone unturned in order to combat it. In the course of this struggle the hidden reality of the world is revealed to them that it constitutes an oppressive system which can be designated as patriarchy or phallogocentrism whose

alienating effects must be lucidly and loudly challenged, be they in the field of education, work, justice, culture, and many more.

Feminism view of the world may not be seen as a doctrinal movement but rather as a raised consciousness process. Feminists begin by apprehending the full extent of sex discrimination and the subtlety and variety of ways in which it is enforced by the agents that appear to be omnipresent. Rich (1979: 35) warns her womenfolk on having self-awareness and entreats them that

Until we [women] can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves.

In response to such a prevailing situation the feminists become vigilant and suspicious, in this way a sense of wariness is created. It is a sort of reappraisal where nothing is taken as a given. The user in a communicative situation must remain constantly alert to assumptions about values subtly woven into a linguistic system which quietly exist throughout. As a mental process of perceiving life, feminism accepts a doctrine and dutifully concerns itself with identifying inadequacies and proposing solutions for improvement in linguistic usage which should be able to express both male and female concerns and aspiration.

The anti-feminists may regard such womankind as the chauvinised woman. Notwithstanding such a chauvinistic interpretation it is clear that feminism is the conscientisation of female victimhood which has developed an in-built rigidity. Feminism seeks to 'feminise' usage or in certain cases render usage neutral by according it a common gender. Such a gender switch will permit users to achieve a balance in values and appreciation of differences.

Dervin (1987: 110) outlines three strands or stages of feminism by describing how it has progressed.

Feminist scholarship has evolved over time...from a focus on sex differences (traditional approach), to a focus on improving society and making women more like men (the reformist or liberal approach), to the current focus on giving voice to women (the radical feminist approach).

Whichever approach one takes it is certain that women are seeking for social justice and equal opportunity of treatment in representation of things expressively conceptually in the world.

Linguistically speaking, feminism advocates calling things by fixed and approved names rather than collocating them on metaphors and stereotypes. In order to call things appropriately conventional canons of usage which have engrained our thinking and naming processes have to be revisited in order to achieve a sense of mutuality of usage of the male and female sexes which has hitherto been given an exaggerated male slant and has adversely affected our patterns of speech and writing syntactically speaking.

Androcentric Patterns of Discourse

The male generic preference is the underlying concept in use and usage which expresses itself in various ways.

Phallogocentric bias is demonstrably observable in the syntax of certain stock English phrases like: *Adam and Eve, John and Mary, Mr & Mrs, male and female, boys and girls, man and woman, husband and wife, sons and daughters*, to name only these ones. It is obvious that the first mentioned items in these stock expressions receive more prominence. Can it be argued that merely itemising things in such an established order, cited above, gives a certain arrogation to males? This androcentric world-view can further be illustrated syntactically in Cameron (1990: 17) where a rape incident has been reported by *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sun* namely :

- (i) *A man who suffered head injuries when attacked by two men who broke into his home in Beckenham, Kent, early yesterday, was pinned down on the bed by intruders who took it in turns to rape his wife.*
 (ii) *A terrified 19-stone husband was forced to lie next to his wife as two men raped her yesterday.*

She analyses that a number of linguistic features in the two reports make this rape an ignominious crime against a husband rather than a wife, viz: the man's experience in the incident is fore-grounded, he is the first person to be mentioned, he is the subject of the main clause as he is the subject of the verbs *suffered* and *was forced*. But as we know what rape is i.e. this assault on a woman's bodily integrity, it is the woman who is forced and who suffers. But the way the biased reports are presented in *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sun* they say rather the contrary - it is the man. Observe the syntactic structure: his wife is appended at the end of the complete sentence and her rape is mentioned in a dependent clause rather than in the main thread of the sentence which is the principal clause. Just a series of syntactic and textual choices (head injuries and violation of his home) add up to a sexist world-view, thus making the rape less appalling than the fact that her husband was forced to witness it. It is clear that by prioritising certain things, as the syntax reveals, a certain male prejudice is created. This becomes more unfortunate in a rape case where a man who is only remotely related to it finds the male ascendancy describing his experiences and the woman who is the victim is only alluded to as if she is only an observer.

A doctorate student Tangang (1999) examining *Go For English* for 4^e in Cameroon Francophone schools shows how gender bias occurs in the association of meaning with *wins*. For example, more serious things concerning win that are done with great feat, shrewdness, and gainful endeavours are associated with the male while the female deals with rather domestic and love scenes when it concerns *wins*, thus :

Wins	
Male	Female
<i>Lottery</i>	<i>His love</i>
<i>Scholarship</i>	<i>His favour</i>
<i>Election</i>	<i>A partner</i>
<i>Job</i>	<i>A person she will like to marry</i>
<i>Wrestling competition</i>	<i>A ticket to travel</i>

Business names or titles, at least the way they are used in christening business companies or enterprises, reflect the male monopoly of proprietorship in Cameroon as elsewhere in the world – thus:

Mbah & Sons Co. *Nwachuku and Brothers Co.*
Mbi & Sons Enterprises. *Groupe Djimeli et fils.*
Guinness Arthur Sons & Co. *Pharmacie Thomas Fils.*
Ets Sebastian Ngu et frères. *Awing Brothers Ltd.*

Some few reasonable proprietors label their business enterprises with a common gender like – Brian Morrison and Family which is one of the richest families in the United Kingdom without demonstrating a particular male penchant.

Even certain proper names and monarchies conserve this male bias: Manda Fils, Bernard Mabin Fils, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and the Kingdoms of Monaco and Belgium.

It is observed that a married woman loses her identity when she and her husband are lumped under the same name of her husband – Mrs Gerald Ford, Mrs Felix Tonye Mbog.

Not many professional women can afford to be assertive like Elizabeth Taylor (even when she was Mrs Elizabeth Burton). Liza 'Ngwa, Anne Marie Ndzie, Gweneth Fox, Audrey Stead who continued to use their maiden titles in marriage. Many women in such situations are still known professionally by their husband's names which somehow eclipse them and their professional achievements.

Early female English novelists like Marian Evans had to use a male pen-name, George Eliot, in order to publish her novels and achieve literary credibility and respectability.

A certain number of Cameroonian professional women are conscious of maintaining their professional names and their new names acquired through marriage. This duality of status is reflected in a type of blend names chained together whereby the newly acquired name, through marriage, is simply tagged onto their maiden names by some of Cameroon media women, viz:

Anne *Nkwain* Nsang.
 Esther *Mulutakwe* Azoh.
 Pamela *Njotu* Bidjocka.
 Mary *Taka* Tanni
 Marie Rose *Messi* Mezanga
 Minko *Abolo* épouse Atangana Abessolo.

Occasionally it is her husband's name which takes precedence, e.g.

Mrs Lobe née *Catherine Ndumbe*.

Even where professional achievement has obliterated the marriage symbol (Mrs) it is still used in Cameroon. For instance:

Dr. *Mrs* Dorothy Njeuma
 Dr. *Mrs* Helen Awasum
 Pr. *Mrs* Rose Leke

The grip of the male is so strong on the female that even when a man has divorced from his wife, his wife continues to be oppressed and aggrieved further as she still bears the vestiges of the former marriage title – e.g.

Mrs Delphine Tsanga,
Mrs Jacqueline Endale Ndedi.

Even when death has separated a husband from his wife one still hears titles like:

Mme Veuve Fonka Shang Lawrence.
Mme Veuve Ernest Akwa Manga Bell.

While a man is regarded as an entity, that is as a complete human being, a woman on the other hand is perceived in various speech acts, playing determinate roles such as existing as a married woman, divorcée, widow, cunt, and spinster, (miss). These roles define her very well and in unambiguous ways. But feminists do not want a woman to continue to remain a fraction of a whole, the woman should be left free and complete in the manner of a man who is not gendered. Why gender women when men are not gendered: bachelor, young, married, widower and many more.

Academic titles like degrees are awarded in English as if the female graduates are not to be considered for such academic excellence, thus:

Bachelor of Arts or Science (BA., B.Sc.)
Master of Arts or Science (MA., M.Sc.)
Master of Philosophy degree (M.Phil.)
Bachelor of Literature (B.Litt.)

How do men feel when women come to obtain their degrees or rather how do women feel when instead of obtaining their own degrees they instead obtain but the men's own. This is surely an area of experience fit for deconstruction. Women like men are all now involved successfully in educational endeavours.

Functional titles for example, master of ceremony, master of the rolls (questeur), master key, master plan, master charge, master card, or master defining certain levels of excellence, like: mastery of the subject matter, masterpiece, all these are of the male preserve as they are associated with the male gender, and become productive in many forms. In the same vein, spokesman, chairman, statesman are considered inappropriate exclusive usage and are being addressed seriously now.

Even job description or job titles have not escaped this linguistic male bias –

Draughts*man*, crafts*man*, sales*man*, camera*man*, fisher*man*, fore*man*, lines*man*, business*man*, press*man*, post*man*, staff*man*, *men* of letters/science.

Religious and State Attitude

Religious doctrine in many ways has reinforced male pervasiveness; for example, the Holy Trinity is made up of God the *Father*, God the *Son*, God the Holy Spirit. Jesus

made his disciples 'fishers of *men*'. Those whom God has joined together let no *man* (no one) put asunder. In the book of *Common Prayer* the officiating minister pours his blessing on the couple by saying

"I pronounce that they (man and woman) become man and wife".

But how can it be that a man and a woman appear before the minister of the church and leave as couple still as *man* and wife instead of husband and wife? The woman has changed into a role (wife) i.e. a relationship to something (man) while the man has remained a man, an entity, a person, that is to say, the thing itself or the human race. The Lord's prayer opens with "Our *Father* who art in heaven". Just a casual glimpse at the motto and national anthem of Cameroon will reveal to one that the motto and anthem are essentially dedicated to male parents, viz:

Motto: Peace-Work-Fatherland

Anthem: O Cameroon, Thou Cradle of our fathers...

Like the *fatherhood* of God and of the Holy Trinity there is the same *fatherhood* of the Cameroon nation as expressed by its motto and anthem. The motherhood of the Cameroon nation in such essential matters is completely glossed over.

Pilgrim *Fathers* (referring to the first settlers of New England in the Mayflower ship); as if that were not enough - U.S.A. is patriotically addressed as the country of *Uncle Sam*, and Great Britain as *John Bull*.

Miller and Swift (1980: 16) list historical titles that use man in ways that obscure women's contributions to civilisation, for instance:

The condition of men; The identity of man; Man's unconquerable mind; the tree where man was born; Man and the Universe; Man's rise to civilisation.

People are seen as men to the extent that it is not uncommon to hear expressions like - while *Frenchmen* like drinking coffee, *Englishmen* prefer tea; in the same tradition we have the following expressions:

Laymen or the man of the street; Countrymen; Manpower Management; Mankind; Man-made products; The principle of democracy in South Africa was based 'one man one vote'.

Though 'man' is used as a prefix or suffix to represent jobs and certain general practices this morpheme may be replaced by more acceptable equivalence. But it is proving more and more difficult and intractable to find reasonable equivalence for processes and concepts which contain 'man' as one of the morphemes of the word concept in the following very important expressions: states*manship*, sports*manship*, sales*manship*, crafts*manship*, *management*.

The Pronoun "He" as a False Generic
Miller and Swift (1980: 37ff) regret that

As a linguistic device imposed on the language rather than a natural development arising from a broad consensus, generic he is fatally flawed. Like generic man "as we have already examined", generic he fosters the misconception that the standard human being is male.

A glance at the sentences below will shed more light on this issue of false generic 'he' or related usage.

(i) *A student in this faculty will be admitted into the examination room only when he has paid his fees.*

(ii) *A careful speaker of English in Cameroon should perpetually guard against the intrusion of French in his use of English.*

(iii) *The spectators were asked to evaluate the compositions of the bikutsi singer in terms of his originality, expressiveness, theatrics and overall posture.*

(iv) *The patient was unable to feed and dress himself.*

The individuals mentioned in these four sentences are non-specific with respect to their sex. In consequence these sentences should be assigned no gender as in the case of (iii) and (iv) or double gender should mark (i) and (ii) where both male and female gender are implied.

This means that the adoption of the double pronoun he or she and sometimes symbolised as s/he as in sentences (i) and (ii) is one way of repairing the imbalance.

Occasionally users could have recourse to the plural antecedent like *students* or *patients* which will eventually allow them the use of the neutral plural gender '*they*' with no gender partisanship. The non-sexist she or he, s/he is intended to reduce the ambiguity of the generic he, though it is judged to be grammatically clumsy. In any case the generic he is fiercely castigated by feminists as an inadequate discourse pronoun capable of representing the whole of humankind. In this case the four sentences can be reconstructed in a transparent manner by pluralising the antecedent and using the appropriate pronoun symbol s/he.

Asymmetry in Female Lexicon

Side by side with the generic *man* and *he* is a certain asymmetry which exists in the vocative address Miss, Mrs and Mr. Mr. is the simple symbol used to address both young and old men, both married and unmarried men. When it comes to addressing women the social anonymity which men enjoy is lost. Rather one observes the invasion of women's privacy as they are addressed as Miss or Mrs with respect to whether they are married or unmarried. Feminists will like to feel that they should simply or courteously be addressed as Ms (Miz). The idea of insisting to define women in relation to a man, for example, 'Miss' meaning the daughter of somebody i.e. the parent is the proprietor or 'Mrs' meaning the wife of somebody i.e. the husband is the proprietor should be replaced by the anonymous symbol Ms. Women want to be entities just like the men are when they use Mr, no matter whether young or old, married or single. But in Cameroon especially among the Bassaphones in the

naming process the female identity is strong and respected as the linguistic honorific 'ngo' meaning the 'daughter of' is used to prefix female proper names, thus: *Ngo* Nguimbus Barbara, *Ngo* Job Françoise, *Ngo* Nyemeck Sandra, Nicole Ngo Ndjock (Were Were Liking).

Spender in Cameron (1990: 106) asserts how those who create usage cause this very medium to influence people's thinking:

Given that language is such an influential force in shaping our world, it is obvious that those who have the power to make the symbols and their meaning are in a privileged and highly advantageous position.

It is an undeniable fact that creators of language are at the same time perpetrators of certain assumptions and also a system of belief through a carefully designed way of symbolisation, aimed at perennising and popularising it.

The rationale is to try to have man gendered and stop him from representing humanity alone and having the woman only co-opted. By 'feminising' use and usage and by gendering man it is hoped that the male centrality of language and the female negative connotations of meaning will be 'reclaimed' and eventually given an acceptable record, which will be representative and transparent.

Semantic Degeneration of of Feminine Meaning

It has been seen how the male values are perpetuated as if they represent the whole of humankind. Male equivalent expressions are consistently used as discourse devices to stand for both genders.

Even when consideration is given so that female counterpart expressions are created they enjoy equality of meaning and treatment with their male corresponding pairs only for a honeymoon period. Sooner or later the female counterparts become devalued either through denigration or trivialisation while the initial male meaning is retained with all elegance and pomp. Gramley and Patzold (1992) cite many revealing examples.

Governor and governess: The male counterpart conveys the idea of a sovereign in a state or province with wide ranging power and authority while governess tends these days to signify a baby-sitter or nursemaid, a private tutor.

Lord and Lady: Lord has deferential connotations, the word is associated with authority, hence his lordship referring to a judge or a bishop, lord mayor (mayor of mayors) while lady tends nowadays to denote any type of woman: imagine Fela referring to lady in his songs as *lèdi*.

Courtier and Courtesan: A courtier is the crown's equerry i.e. an officer of the court while a courtesan which is the female counterpart stands for a prostitute with wealthy or aristocratic clients.

Major and Majorette: A major is a senior officer while a majorette is a lady dressed in short skirts and marches ahead of a band in a sort of side show ambiance.

Master and Mistress: A master is an expert or specialist or a boss while a mistress is generally referred to a lover.

King and Queen: A king is a chieftain and remains so whereas Queen with its homonym Queen refers to a beautiful lady.

Ram and Sheep: A ram is a horned-animal that can bully while a sheep is a dull-witted animal that tends to be tender in comportment.

Nephew and Niece: A nephew is the son of one's brother or sister and niece is the daughter of one's sister or brother but nowadays it has become a euphemism for the illegitimate daughter of a priest or his concubine.

Poet and Poetess: A poet is a writer of poems while a poetess is a female writer of poems of poor quality.

Race horse and Maiden horse: In a sporting contest a race horse is a horse that wins while a maiden horse is the horse that has not yet won.

Certain forms of endearment, especially names, which become intimate and fond names have acquired pejoration as they now express sexual implications, for example: *Dolly, Polly, Gilly, Minx, girlie, nymph, mouse, cat.*

Terms like 'professional' and 'private' which have the same form in both male and female representation convey their primary meaning when referring to males - i.e. expert/specialist and highway or sea robber - but with respect to females they express sexual overtones; for instance, professional associated with females involves the oldest profession which is known to be prostitution and a female pirate refers to an adulteress who chases other women's men. 'Call' collocating with boy and girl express different connotations e.g. callboy is a person who calls actors when it is time for them to go on stage while a call girl is a whore or prostitute.

If terms designating men are used to denote a woman, an ill-feeling is usually not created (waiter, host, bachelor, dog, tom-boy). In many cases when one uses them to refer to woman it is usually thought that an error of identification has been made, nothing else. But call a man a bitch, sissy, spinster, granny, sheep - then you have delivered an insult on him.

Certain male and female words collocating with some words are favourable with the male words and unfavourable with the female situation. For instance: bachelor eve or degree, financial wizard are favourable, while witch hunting and witchcraft are unfavourable connotations.

All these examples go to show how the female counterparts of some of the words have derogated. In other words the female forms in their downhill slide have in certain degrees become debased. This idea seems to reflect the thinking of Schulz (1975: 65) in this matter when she declares that

Again and again in the history of the language, one finds that a perfectly innocent term designating a girl or a woman may begin with totally neutral or even positive connotations, but gradually it acquires negative implications, at first perhaps only slightly disparaging, but after a period of time becoming abusive and ending as a sexual slur.

Obviously denigration may come about as a result of prejudicial usage where offensive language turns round a woman, like in Pidgin English expression *your Mami pima*, (female genitalia), *your Mami yi head* (your mother's head) used by males to insult females. In actual fact any physiological part of one's mother can be used in most of our home languages or in pidgin to denigrate a woman. Sometimes it is the crude exaggerated notion of a woman being nothing but a cunt, hence these words denoting her negatively in various ways in English:

Whore, hag, warhorse, wench, prostitute, harlot, twofcr, pinchprick, noonlighter, taillinder, underwear, broad tail, and many other, misogynist labels.

It is definitely not the women themselves who have coined and used these words or expressions as derogatory epithets for each other. There is no doubt that it is men who describe and discuss women in sexual terms and insult them with sexual slurs.

This is consonant with Spender in Cameron (1990: 106) who feels that:

The group "like men" which has the power to ordain the structure of language, thought and reality, has the potential to create a world in which they are the central figures, while those who are not of their group are peripheral and therefore may be exploited.

All these instances combine to demonstrate how words associated with women have developed in ways not paralleled for words associated with men. Such an asymmetrical treatment of female words and their related forms which convey semantic derogation may be a reflex of social power structure. Who told you that language use and meaning is not a mirror of a social reality that has been conventionalised. The masculine form has the most power and the real favourable connotation as it is considered the base or the prototype. In this vein women have decided to be insiders and shareholders of the linguistic discourse.

Certain Feminine Morphological Suffixes

In keeping with female forms undergoing derogation or devaluation comes another feminine grammatical patterning in English. In the manner of French and Latin certain feminine suffixes like, for example: *ine*, *ette*, *ess*, are appended to the root forms of certain English words. Instead of these

suffixes denoting just feminine gender they in addition convey certain connotations in English which may be the following:

'-INE' Suffix Marker

'-ine' suffix means pertaining to, suggests a relationship to something and not the thing itself, hence:

<i>Carol</i>	<i>Caroline</i>	<i>Ernest</i>	<i>Ernestine</i>
<i>Serpent</i>	<i>Serpentine</i>	<i>Clement</i>	<i>Clementine</i>
<i>Hero</i>	<i>Heroine</i>	<i>Tambour</i>	<i>Tambourine</i>
<i>Figure</i>	<i>Figurine</i>	<i>Angel</i>	<i>Angeline</i>
<i>Alps</i>	<i>Alpine</i>	<i>Pascal</i>	<i>Pascaline</i>
<i>Rose</i>	<i>Roseline</i>	<i>Just</i>	<i>Justine</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Christian</i>		

The words that end in 'ine' are merely relating to the root words, they are in no way the root words. In fact they are simply pertaining to them as if they were only their shadow.

'-ESS' Suffix Marker

'-ess'. When the suffix - 'ess' is attached to common nouns it denotes that the derived word has become sub-standard, thus:

<i>host</i>	<i>hostess</i>
<i>waiter</i>	<i>waitress</i>
<i>steward</i>	<i>stewardess</i>
<i>shepherd</i>	<i>shepherdess</i>
<i>author</i>	<i>authoress</i>
<i>governor</i>	<i>governess</i>
<i>actor</i>	<i>actress</i>
<i>Negro</i>	<i>Negress</i>
<i>Jew</i>	<i>Jewess</i>

In order to illustrate that 'ess' attached to the root word causes that root word to deviate one can use the case where when a woman hosts a television show she is known as a host but when a female waiter welcomes patrons in the restaurant she is called a hostess. Such a divided usage has caused certain airline management to abandon using hostess, waitress, stewardess for their female personnel. They either use the masculine gender (host, waiter, steward) or they prefix it with 'female', hence: female host, female waiter, female steward or the common gender 'flight attendant' to denote them. Whenever the words persist with the 'ess' morpheme then they become devalued in meaning and convey certain unfavourable connotations. For example:

- poetess signifies a female writer of poems of poor quality;
- authoress denotes a female author in her infancy, just trying her hand in authoring;
- governess signifies a nursemaid or private tutor.

In fact when this morphological element is attached to a proper noun it sounds offensive and people tend to avoid its occurrence. For instance:

- *Jewess* now becomes *Jew* or *female Jew*
- *Negress* now becomes *Negro* or *Black woman* or *Black African American*

'-ETTE' Suffix Marker

'-ette': The suffix 'ette' denotes either small size or something of imitation i.e. something that looks like the original or genuine one. Thus:

- *diskette* means like a disk or small disk;
- *suffragette* means like a suffragist;
- *kitchenette* means like a kitchen or small kitchen;
- *lecturette* means like a lecture or something resembling a lecture;
- *leatherette* means like a leather or imitation leather;
- *farmerette* means small farmer or like a farmer;
- *superette* means a small super market or like a super market;
- *Sakerette* means like Saker students or little Saker students;
- *Paulette* means like Paul;
- *Launderette* means a room or shop for washing and drying clothes or like a laundry room where clothes are washed and ironed.

All these feminine morphological forms of English denote that the norm or root pattern is masculine and that their derivatives (feminine forms) which they represent convey implications which debase the original meaning. It is therefore an aberration among many anglophone women that they are showing a lot of interest in taking names with demeaning suffixes like Pauline, Christine, Sakerette, etc. rather than Paulina, Christina and Saker students which convey favourable connotations.

The tendency of hesitating between using certain forms of words is similar in French where the social function of an act determines the morphological form a word. As it has already been seen a woman hosting a television show resists being called a hostess but in a restaurant where she welcomes patrons she gladly accepts being addressed as a hostess. This reminds one of the following sentences in French:

- *Mme Nicole Lobe est directrice de la crèche 'papillons';*
- *Mme Marlyse Matip est directeur de l'enseignement secondaire général et technique;*
- *Mme Yaou est le Ministre de la Condition Féminine qui est toujours travailleux et très dévoué;*
- *Mlle Ngassa est inspectrice de l'enseignement maternelle alors que sa tante est directeur des impôts au Ministère des Finances.*

The social significance of functions and the nature of the job clearly play a leading role in gender marking or grammatical concord. It seems that the more elevated the social function the gender or grammatical concord is likely to be masculine and when the role is less significant in social status the feminine gender tends to be preferred.

Since Varda One's *Manglish* (1970) and Spender's *Man Made Language* (1980) have rendered women invisible, have reduced them to stereotypes, trivialised and demeaned them, feminists in vehemence with one voice are advocat-

ing wide ranging changes which should improve this repressive and misogynist attitude. In consequence feminists suggest:

- that man and his allied expressions should be gendered so that man ceases to represent the whole of humanity; e.g. he or she, s/he,
- that Miss and Mrs should be degendered like Mr and become Ms.
- that noun antecedents, should be pluralised e.g. bikutsi dancer → bikutsi dancers.
- that sexist gender should in certain cases become common gender, e.g. history/herstory → homostory
host/hostess → flight attendant
spokesman/spokeslady → spokesperson
chairman/chairlady → chair/chairperson

- that a completely new idiom like the one by Elgin has been created to encode the perceptions of women and their special concerns which a common language is yet to express.

Thus:

radiidin - non-holiday - a time allegedly a holiday but actually so much a burden because of work and preparations that it is a dreaded occasion, especially when there are too many guests and none of them help.

Nuhaam - to feel oneself cherished, cared for, nurtured by someone; to feel loving-kindness.

Dooledosh - pain or loss which comes as a relief by virtue of ending the anticipation of its coming.

Such an invented lexicon by Suzette Haden Elgin represents a woman's language which can describe, for example, the complexities of and feelings towards pregnancy, menstruation, varieties of love which can be described by the present male idiom only through lengthy explanations which for most of the time are lopsided; and that even with the existing lexicon feminist definitions or reinterpretations should be provided to replace the man-made ones - e.g. tipping according to '*manglish*' is a gift or gratuity, i.e. a small sum of money tendered for a service performed; but according to Elgin's *laadan* it is redefined as a fantasy that allows our society to justify less than minimum wages for wateresses.

Findings and Conclusion

Feminism as an advocacy of equal rights and opportunities presents a scope with an infectious vitality in the eyes of the linguist. The issue though controversial remains a live debate. The English language is not a dead language like Latin which suffers from a fixation. It is a living language and like a Darwinian concept of evolutionary change it is a natural organism which evolves and adapts. This will bring in startling renovations and innovations which instead of threatening its development will rather be its strength to adapt to new and changing conditions. Who is the linguist who advocates language growth and development and at the same time resists language renovation and innovation? Wouldn't

such an attitude be paradoxical? Wouldn't it fail for not being consequential? Could one discuss modern mathematics without appreciating an avalanche of novel techniques and expressions in conceptualisation? Women do not want to express themselves in male discourse. They do not want to be outsiders, they want to be part of it.

The merits of feminism lie in enlivening the lives of its advocates and followers who demonstrate intense interest in finding, creating and using alternatives to the man-made mainstream lexicographic traditions (*manglish*) so as to enable women speak with their own authentic voices. In this way feminists hope to be able to desist from being just mere receivers and transmitters of the conventional code of expression which renders them incapable of making original contributions to language use and usage.

It is a well established fact that language is a system of sounds, signs and symbols through which human beings think and communicate information and ideas. As a mental phenomena language influences our thoughts and actions in the society. The structures, systems and lexical usage of a language like English reflect in a way the male centred patterns of culture where there exist oppressive practices as he or son or man and other male related forms of preference. Linguistic behaviour reflects the inter-relationship between language and social roles. In this way the type of cultural conditioning that is reflected linguistically is a potent force for male dominated language structure and a perverse paradigm for female submissiveness and powerlessness.

Feminism, despite some of its limitations has promoted public awareness in linguistic usage. As a process it is stimulating research on language and gender, especially on women and language resources. Using language resources, feminism attempts to rethink, in depth, the human adventure and move on toward what is yet to be. New linguistic practices are now at play. If any real positive thing has been achieved by feminism it is the fact that it has sensitised speakers and writers, to the non-neutral nature of linguistic representation which has dominated linguistic usage to the detriment of the women who have been marginalised linguistically. Linguistic deconstruction in abandoning time-honoured usage and linguistic reconstruction in the area of renovation and innovation emerge with energy and enthusiasm that throb the heart and stimulate creative reflections.

With the on-going process of New World Information Order, New World Economic Order, New World Political Order, that is, feminism feels it opportune to usher in

another new order. Call it as you like but since it is about language and gender one could in the light of the on-going international concerns designate it as New World Order for Linguistic Usage, a certain feminine lexicon, bearing in mind language and gender as the point of departure.

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